

## Burnt Toast

At breakfast

the old toasters sat at either end of the table,  
one next to the spoon jar and one next to the sugar jar,  
chrome-plated steel on yellow oilcloth.

The sides leaned together to make an A, like hands praying.  
We lowered each side, put in the bread slices,  
closed the doors, and watched the coils glow.

Early morning, distracted by woodstove, siblings,  
comics, and talk, we'd smell and then see  
a pillar of smoke rising from the praying hands,

a sacrifice bumping against the sooty heaven  
of the kitchen ceiling, signaling we'd failed  
in our vigilance and not opened the doors in time.

Then we'd scrape the black cinders into the sink.  
On such occasions my grandfather would say,  
"I've always liked my toast a little charred."

So we learned to accept black specks on jellied toast,  
like the burnt tapioca and black-bottomed cookies,  
expecting no sweetness without ashes in the mouth.